

## Interview H0043: with Tsarong Rimshi, Dündül Namgyal [tib. tsha rong rim bzhi, bdud 'dul rnam rgyal],, (India, 1991) : Part No. 7 of 7

*Tsarong Rimshi, whose personal name was Dündül Namgyal, was a well-known Western educated Tibetan official from one of the richest and most important aristocratic families. He was the son of Tsarong Dzasa, the architect of the program of military and infrastructural modernization after the 13th Dalai Lama returned from exile in India in 1913. On this tape he discusses his work in Chamdo as a member of the second denshu when the Dalai Lama came back from Beijing. In 1955, there was a lot of talk and some newspapers were smuggled into Lhasa that said that the communist were against religion and that they were disarming Kham. He discusses again his participation in a tour of China. When he returned to Lhasa, the Chinese leaders were cold and pretended that they didn't know him. Because of this, he thought that if he stayed in Lhasa, that one day he would disappear. He asked for leave from the government to make offerings for his late mother and he went to India with his father in 1958.*

Q

Last time we got as far as 1954. I won't ask you about the China trip since I already asked you that. If I need to I will ask later.

A

Yes, that will not be required.

Q

Last time you mentioned that the Dalai Lama went down and then returned and so you and Surkhang Depön went down and so [unfinished]

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A

Yes. Surkhang Khenjung and I. There were also the representatives of the 3 great monasteries and the People's Association. Altogether there were about 15-16 persons. We went to Chamdo and stayed there. The Dalai Lama did not come, so we stayed for about 10-12 days. There was nothing to do and so the two of us stayed at the monastery and strolled about town and took some photos. Then we went for a picnic. I also took some photographs at the picnic. It was a shot of us having tea, all lined up. So when the Dalai Lama came, we went to receive him and he stayed for about 3 days. He gave a teaching.

Q

Who was not permitting them [people to approach close by]?

A

The Chinese. They must have been suspicious of something, I don't know. We left before the Dalai Lama. The Chinese provided us with what they referred to as Ghas Liu [qu](#), a Russian jeep. Surkhang Kungö and I and Künsangtse Kungö and maybe Khenjung Samjola were there too. Since it was cold, the jeep would not go into 1st gear and we had to use 4-wheel drive. So at a crawling pace the jeep gradually warmed up and then 1st gear was used. When the temperature warmed up it went fast.

Q

Besides giving some teachings, what else did the Dalai Lama do?

A

Just a teaching.

Q

He stayed for three days, so did he visit monasteries?

A

Yes. He stayed for three days and rested. And he must have stayed at the monastery. There were monastic abbots and they must have had an audience. But we weren't around those places.

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Q

Did you come up [to Lhasa] together?

A

We went back ahead.

Q

So when you came up whether on the road or at Lhasa were all the people ready.

A

Indeed. They were all ready and we arrived ahead. Then we had to go and receive him and so I put on my 4th rank costume and we went to Gungthang [tib. [gung](#) thang]. When the Dalai Lama arrived there, all the government officials had to go there. So all the officials, monk and lay [tib. ser skya] were there.

Q

So how did the Dalai Lama come up? In the traditional way or were the Chinese there.

A

The Chinese were there. obviously together.

Q

With soldiers and all.

A

Yes, some soldiers. The Chinese leaders had all come to receive the Dalai Lama. There were many.

Q

So when was this.

A

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It was in the 3rd or 4th month of 1955. At that time, my Land Rover had arrived - no, no, I had the jeep and so we drove in that to Gungthang.

Q

Now during this time the Dalai Lama had come back so what was the mood in Lhasa and what was the political climate around 1954-55.

A

In 1955, well, it was sort of like that [tib. de 'dra ra cig red] [it was so-so]. However there was a lot of talk that at Chamdo they did this and that. They said that things were said in the newspapers and so they quietly smuggled some newspapers and brought them up to Lhasa. It said that they did not like religion and in 1955 they were just starting to take away guns. That summer we stayed at Lhasa. Then in September-August we had to go for the tour. So they were getting ready for this and my name was said to be included in the list. In 1955, I had to go to India and they said what are you going to do in India? I said whatever you order me to do I will do it. If you tell me to go down [to China] I will. If you tell me to go [to India] I will. After that the Kashag did not say anything.

Q

The Kashag never told you to go here or there.

A

After [that meeting with the Kashag] they did not tell me anything. The Chinese are the more powerful and so when it was said that I was on the list to go [on the tour] that was it. The Kashag did not tell me anything. Then I went down. I have told you about that in detail, so there is no need to say anything, right?

Q

You are referring to China trip, right?

A

Yes. I stayed in China for about 7 months.

Q

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Yes. If I need to ask you about that I will do it later, right? And so in China you went down and- well it doesn't matter, let me ask you about it anyway. Before you went down, you went to welcome the Dalai Lama back, right? What route did you take?

A

Yes. We went down for the [denshu](#) reception in 1955. We went via the main route via Chamdo.

Q

Did you go all the way to Chamdo by car?

A

Yes, all the way.

Q

When you went later, was it the same route.

A

No. Later it was via the Northern route. We went in a truck. This road was very difficult. Actually it was not much of a road just the tire marks of vehicles [on the ground]. There was no special thing as a road. Then in the rivers, we filled them up with rocks and then crossed. Lhalu's jeep got stuck, so a rope was tied and it was towed out. But after that it would not go.

Q

When was this?

A

In 1955.

Q

In 1955 the roads were not good, right?

A

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On the Northern route there was nothing [no real road]

Q

On the northern plains I guess one could drive wherever one wanted to, right?

A

Yes. Since it was all flat one could go anywhere. And even at Shukula [tib. shog bu lags] pass they just drove over it. It was called a pass but the altitude was very high already and so there was nothing there but a bump [at the pass]. So we just followed the trucks and it was just all muddy. The large American Dodge trucks had to engage 4-wheel drive.

Q

So which places did you go to?

A

You mean in China?

Q

Yes.

A

At first we went to Xining, then Lanzhou, Beijing and from there everything was prepared and then we went to Dongbei, which is in Manchuria. It went all the way up to the border near Harbin. The Russian border was close by. Then we went to see Port Arthur and then we returned. Then we went south towards Shanghai, to a ceramics factories and many others. Altogether it took us 7 months from the time we left [Tibet] to the time we returned.

Q

Since you were going on a tour, whatever place you got to. was the daily routine pretty much the same?

A

Yes, It was the same, with more things to see at some times than at others.

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Q

When you were on tour where did you stay?

A

We all stayed in hotels.

Q

Did 4th rank and above officials have better accommodations?

A

Yes, I think so. I haven't been to where the majority stayed, but most probably they stayed in some large dorms. There were many servants too.

Q

Each one had at least one servant?

A

Yes.

Q

Did mother come?

A

Yes. We brought only one servant, Künga. Lhalu had about two. The maidservant had come also.

Q

Did they provide meals too?

A

Yes. Everything. One did not have to do anything.

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Q

Now Tibetans love their butter tea in the mornings, so how was that arranged?

A

They didn't give any.

Q

Did not others bring a churn and the servants make Tibetan tea?

A

Maybe some must have done that, but we did not.

Q

What would the daily routine be like?

A

It was the same everywhere. We got up very early and washed.

Q

What time?

A

I think it was around 6 a.m. At 7 we had to go immediately for breakfast.

Q

Did anybody wake you up?

A

I think there was a bell. When we were going down to China, they blew the whistle in the morning like in the military.

Q

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They whistled?

A

Yes. Each one had their tent and so they blew a whistle. When we got to the hotels, I think there was a bell. So we all got up and washed quickly and went down to eat at 7 a.m. After breakfast, they immediately put us in buses and they took us to see a factory. When we get there, they took us to a large hall. Our leader gave an introduction and said that the "manager", there is a Chinese word for him but I've forgotten it, will give you the details. So the manager told us the story of the factory and said many things. Now I'm giving you just one example. They took us to a large electricity plant which had three generators. They said that, "This was built by the Germans earlier and had many problems." And then they told all the difficulties and said, "So later, with the help of experts from the Soviet Union [ch. su lian zhuan jia] who have sacrificed their private concerns for the common good, it became a wonderful plant. And under the leadership of Chairman Mao things have improved and is producing greater electricity, unlike in the earlier periods." So they told this story and then they said that they were going to take us on a tour [of the plant]. They took us in groups of 10-15 people with a person appointed to look after the group. Then they showed us everything and then those 4th rank and above [officials] they asked us to come.

Q

So this is after you have returned?

A

No. In the factory itself. There is a smaller room, like a living room in which the 4th rank and above officials were called. There tea was given, and fruits and some candies and then they asked us [questions]. Our Group leaders [tib. [tuan](#) zhang] were Lhalu and Ngüchu [tib. rngul chu] Rimpoche, also known as Ngagchen Rimpoche of Tashilunpo. Then there was someone from Chamdo. So they will ask them.

Q

They will ask them what?

A

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They will ask us things. They will say, "You have now been on a tour and what is your opinion?"

Q

Who asked?

A

The "manager." He spoke in Chinese and we had an interpreter called Baba Jigme Tomden [tib. 'jigs med stobs ldan]. Now they had already told us about the plant, right. Now they had shown it to us, isn't it? So we Tibetans don't know anything and there is nothing to say but, "It is as you have said earlier, it is very good. And [under the leadership of] Mao Zedong..."

Q

Earlier the battery ran out and those who were 4th rank and above had to go to some sort of living room and say something right? So, the plant manager asked you something.

A

The manager asked our opinion. The leader was Lhalu, and so he spoke. Now they had already told us about the plant and everything was noted down right? So that's all we knew about the plant, right? So whatever was said to us was repeated and in addition to that Mao Zedong was praised saying things like. "Mao Zedong liberated China and peacefully liberated Tibet and now we have come down here and we have obtained this opportunity to see things and this is very good. And what we saw today was astounding," So we had to say that and that's all we said. So as I mentioned there was one tour in the morning then another in the afternoon. We returned, had lunch, rested for a while and then they took us to a shoe factory, a ceramics factory, or an electric or an automobile factory or whatever, and the same thing that happened in the morning took place again. Then we returned around 4:30 p.m. and I think tea was served. Then we rested for a while, and then they said that around 6 or 7 p.m. that there will be a show. So everyone was taken there in a bus. Sometimes they showed a film, and at times a Chinese opera. We didn't know the language and some of the Khambas who were next to us were fast asleep and snoring. Then we returned around 10 or so. And so that was a day's tour.

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Q

Now regarding the shows, were there movies, and Chinese Opera, and then wasn't there also some social dancing.

A

Yes, we went to some dances.

Q

Now regarding movies, what kind did they show? What did we Tibetans like?

A

They didn't show things that Tibetans liked. Mostly they were about war. How the war was fought and how the People's Liberation Army won and how the people gathered around and were so happy. Things like that. Mostly propaganda.

Q

Then maybe they showed something about the Soviet Union.

A

No, they didn't show about that. I don't recall any.

Q

What about the Japanese invasion?

A

Yes. They showed that. And then also about how they fought the Guomindang and how areas were liberated. It was mostly all about that.

Q

What kind of opera did they show?

A

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The one with some headgear and the one where they jump up and down. At times they showed something like a circus, with actors standing on one's head and twirling plates

Q

Acrobatics.

A

Yes.

Q

What's that one called Old China man or White Beard?

A

White Beard. They showed that a lot.

Q

Did Tibetans like that?

A

No way. They went to sleep. They didn't know the language and the play. Now if there was something exciting like a war, jumping up and down, and monkeys appearing with acrobatics, then they watched for a while. But if there was dialogue and when they [sang](#) "Oh-Oh", we didn't know the song nor the language and so after sometime we fell sleep.

Q

What about the dances. Did many know how to dance . Did they all go?

A

Yes quite a lot went, but there were many who did not go.

Q

For example, if one were to go to dance, was that in a hall?

A

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Yes.

Q

And were there Chinese women appointed to help with the dance [partners]?

A

Yes, many. There were teachers. Or should I say there were some who knew and others who were just dragged along.

Q

Did they come and ask you to dance?

A

Yes, the Chinese women came and asked.

Q

And what about the monk officials and lamas and some of the Khambas who had never danced in their lives?

A

Even if they did not know, they will take them. Then they will look and move their feet. Some of the Khambas did dance a lot. Though they did not know the steps they would move to and fro. It was like walking. When the drum beats once you just move one step and then another and so on (laughter). It was so funny.

Q

So was the dance a waltz or the fox trot.

A

Both. There was the quick fox trot and the slow one. They had some names for them but I have forgotten.

Q

What kind of music did they play?

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A

Mostly Chinese music. At that time they did not have any modern music. There were Chinese songs. Shanghai was a bit more modern. There was a Korean Autonomous Region. I think it was part of Korea earlier, I don't know. The people were mostly Korean and they wore the Korean style clothing. In that area the music was good and there were a lot of people who knew how to dance and the women danced well. It was much more modern. When we went to Korea, I was appointed as a Tuanzhang. The reason for this was that Lhalu and the two others and I think Thönpa Khenjung also - maybe there were 5-6 persons. They were being quite secretive and said that they had to go some place and so they appointed a representative. So I was appointed as the representative. I had to give a speech and at that time there was a dance that evening. After the speech, the dance began.

Q

What did you say?

A

It was already prepared for me.

Q

Already?

A

We would make one right? We asked the Chinese interpreter about the name of the place and other information. So we said that we had gone to this and that place and today we arrived here and would like to thank you for your reception and the tours were excellent and thanks to Mao Zedong we were liberated and there was such a speech. So this speech was given and Chinese tea and some fruits were given, and then the dance begins. Then they would give a speech right? Later it was known that Lhalu and the others were taken to a military exercise with tanks and planes bombing. This was secretive and they did not take everyone.

Q

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You have been to India since 1936 in Boarding School and you have also been to Calcutta and other parts of India and have seen factories. But the other Tibetans had not seen such things so they must have felt that things were good in China, right?

A

Yes, they would see things as being good.

Q

What did you think?

A

Well, it was so-so. Nothing special. In fact, I was thinking to myself that in India steel was much more abundant. Most of the electrical poles in China were wooden while in India they were steel wherever one went. Even in the remote places it was steel. The railway wagons were made from wood, while in India it was all steel. So I thought that steel must be more abundant and better in India.

Q

Earlier, before the batteries ran out, you said something about the Bata Shoe Company [he said it was better than the shoe factories in China] and some machines actually bore the name of Manchester.

A

Yes. There were many machines. There were textile looms on which the company name Manchester was stamped. However, they never said anything about the machines being from England. Towards Manchuria, it was all Japanese factories. They may have made some improvements, I don't know, but that was the base. The houses and hotels seemed to have been built by the Japanese. The places where one takes a bath were all Japanese style.

Q

Let me mention since the battery ran out earlier that sometimes Lhalu did make a kind of criticism. Earlier you mentioned that he said that production had increased however

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the number given earlier is greater than what is quoted for this year. So how was that? At times would he ask things like that?

A

Ngagchen Rimpoche would also say some things. He used to take me to one side and say, "In the old days it was not like this at all. It was much better."

Q

Is that right? He's lived in China earlier.

A

Yes. He stayed in China when the Panchen Rimpoche was there, right?

Q

He's from [Tashilhunpo](#)?

A

Yes.

Q

He's not Dzasa Che Jigme?

A

No, no. He lived in China for a long time. We were taken to a dockside. Most probably it was Shanghai. There was nothing. There were about two ships there. We were the ones who toured the place and it was silent, unlike the docks in India with collies and all the hustle and bustle. There were just two boats standing there and there were no goods being loaded or unloaded. On top of the boats were 3-4 foreign looking persons looking down. So in an empty dock they took us up and down and I thought, "That is strange"

Q

This was a tour of a dockside, right?

A

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Yes, there was nothing there.

Q

So then you came up [to Tibet], right?

A

Yes. On the way up [to Lhasa], we came via the southern route. At places the road was broken up that we walked and [our things were] transshipped to the other side. I also have photos of that. We came up in a hurry and were just able to get back in time for the [inauguration of the] Tibet Autonomous Region which was begun on 6th day of the 4th month. They said that we have to be there on time and we arrived there on the 5th day of the 4th month. The next day was the opening of the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region. I don't know if this got in the tape or not earlier, but Liu Buzhang was our leader. But he stayed at Chengdu and said that Liu Zhuxi or somebody was going to take us so we should go [to Tibet] and everyone should behave well. This they had instructed everyone. One evening I was called to his room and he said, "I am staying and you all will be going up. Your father is our friend. This time on the tour your attitude, mood, disposition [tib. rnam 'gyur] was not at all good. If you do that, it will not be good for you. When you get there [Lhasa] you have to say clearly the good things that you saw. So this time your attitude was not good!" So he warned me a lot. I did not say a word. I must have said goodbye and left. When I got to Lhasa it seems that they had already sent word. They [Chinese leaders] acted cold [toward me]. Earlier they would briskly shake hands and said "Hello!," the way the Chinese usually do. But they did not do that. They pretended as if they did not see me and did not know me.

Then in 1957, in the 7th month, my mother passed away. After about 20 days, my late father told me to take my late mother's bed and rubber mattress and along with a scarf give the items to the hospital. It was the occasion of the opening of the new hospital and we had an invitation. So we took the items and I put a scarf in my dress pouch and went. A lot of the officials were there. The Chinese leaders had not come. The ceremony was to start at 9, but we had to wait and wait and they came only around 11. So we were just hanging around, walking upstairs and then coming down, smoking and chatting. When I was descending the stairs; you know the square staircases that go from one floor to another, about halfway down the stairs the Chinese leaders were coming and I moved to the corner of the staircase. There was somebody else with me but I can't remember who.

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I took off my [hat](#) and held it in my hand though I didn't salute [tib. phyag 'bul] to them and moved aside [to the corner]. They came and gave me an angry look and they did not have the slightest inclination to say Hello. They showed me a very stern face [tib. gdong nag po] and passed by. "A ha", I thought. "Now it's not good at all. If I hang around anymore I would one day disappear or something else will happen. They will whisk me away in the middle of the night." My mother had passed away and so I told my late father it is our custom to do some offerings and that maybe it is better if we went and did it in India. Your uncle [Ragashag](#) was there. He supported me and told my father now its better to go. That this is a good opportunity. I did not specifically mention it to him [father], but he knew. So he thought about it and said maybe we should apply for permission. My father received permission for one year, but they said that I cannot go. So my father said, what's the use of me alone going to India. I will do some offerings at Tsarong Estate, Shigatse and other sacred places. They had said that you cannot go and so I could take Taring Bettyla along." So I was so unhappy and so I said that I am going to go and seek permission once again. So I went to see the [Shape](#). I said, "My father is old and there are a lot of frozen precipices on Natöla area and even if I am not permitted to leave, I request permission to go up to the border. So please give me leave. I am going to make such a petition". They said that is very difficult. .

Q

So in 1958 you went to seek permission from the Shapes. Who were the Shapes then and what did they say?

A

There was [Ramba](#), Surkhang, Shasur and Ngabö. But I did not go in front of Ngabö. Just the three of them.

Q

Wasn't Ngabö there?

A

It seems he did not come much [to the Kashag]. So I went and [Ramba](#) said, "Yes, apply and we will do what we can." We were not that intimate. I asked Shasur, who was sort of intimate, but he said in a lowered voice, "Of course we wouldn't hesitate to give you leave,

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but the Chinese are just watching, they are just watching." We were sort of intimate; my father and he were very close. "The Chinese are just watching and so it is very difficult to do things. Anyway, apply and we will do what we can, however it's very difficult to do anything. Surkhang said, "Very good. Yes, make the application. Are you taking off, taking off?". I was vague and said, "Well not all the way, but I should go up to there". He said, "Yes, Yes. Make the application and we will do what we can". He winked at me and said, "Yes go, better to leave now." So I made a one-page application through the Kashag and they granted me the permission, saying that I could go to the border and that I must return from the border. Then we packed. Some of the packing was done earlier. I drove the Land Rover and we had a truck. Thargye [tib. dar sgyas] drove that. No, it was not Thargye. The truck driver was one Chinese guy. He was Korean.

Q

Was he your driver?

A

Yes, we hired him. Thargye was a good driver and he was with me. Trinley [tib. 'phrin las] also knew how to drive. They were the servants [Note: they were sort of modern servants who were educated in Dr. Graham's School, Kalimpong]. Künga was also with us [another servant], but in the truck. Thargye and Triley were at the back with me as the driver's helper. Now regarding this do you really need much detail?

Q

Not much about the road, but say it anyway.

A

The truck went ahead, but it stalled and would not start. I had brought jumper cables with me as it seemed the battery was not charging. So we used the Land Rover and jump-started the truck and we went and stopped for the night. The next day, we stopped at Shigatse and stayed with the Dele Rabten [tib. bde legs rab brtan] family.

Q

Was Uncle Chandzö la there?

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A

No, he had already passed away. Chandzö Ngodrubla [tib. dngos grub lags] was there. And so people came to see [my father].

Q

Now at the border, did they check?

A

My father had sort of a passport and so I specifically drove to the check-post point. Right to the front. Anyway I drove most of the way, especially the dangerous roads. I stopped right in front of the check-post. We all got out with the servants. We showed the pass and they noted down all the names of the servants. I said my name was Dündül Namgyal, which they wrote down. They didn't say anything.

Q

Now was this the check-post or the border?

A

This was the main check-post. After that there wasn't any other. This one was at [Yadong](#), at Chumbi, where earlier the Trade Agent stayed. On the other side was the check post.

Q

You had permission to go up to the border and so, what was considered the border.

A

The border was all the way to the peak of Natöla. So I went down and after a mile we stayed at [Yadong](#) Rinchengang. We had people we knew there and so we stayed with them. We stayed the day as well as the next. I jacked up the vehicles, took out the carburetor, took out the gas. I showed Thargye everything and instructed him on what to do on the return trip. Then we left. Chumbi was about 8-10 miles only. We had hired pack animals and we rode and got there about 4 p.m. That evening I inquired whether the pack animals were coming. They said that they had come. So I said that they will leave very early tomorrow and since we have to shovel the snow we should leave together with them

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early in the morning. So right after them we left and reached the mountain top at sunrise. We had our tea flask and took some photographs. There was nobody around. So we walked slowly and nobody was there to say anything. Once this was negotiated, my heart was relieved. Then we came down to Kalimpong. From [Yadong](#) we phoned Tessla and she sent the car. I think she sent it up to Tsongo [tib. mtsho 'go] or 10th mile. My father said that he didn't want to stay in Gangtok so we came straight to Kalimpong. We arrived here [the present House] at about 8 at night.

Q

You said that from [Yadong](#) you made a call. At that time what kind of phone was it.

A

A radio. At that time the Indians were there. We knew them.

Q

When you say radio, is that wireless.

A

Wireless I think. At that time the phone must be working too. And they must have called here. So from Gangtok they must have called here [Bhutan House, Kalimpong, where my aunt lived]. The message reached very nicely. Then we arrived here. I think that may be enough.